

# Navy man found the right mate

By STEVE DONOVAN, CLIPPER CONTRIBUTOR

Thomas Francis Welch, Frank to all who knew him, was a handy man to be married to. Besides being good with machines, tools and woodworking, he was a man Rita always talked ideas over with and one who usually could provide common sense perspective coupled with enthusiastic support. Rita talked everything over with Frank, for theirs was a marriage of shared respect.

## THE MONUMENT BRICKS

Bricks for Memories: each brick suggests a story and helps to provide the funding to rebuild and refurbish a once lost Duxbury monument. The monument lists those from Duxbury who served their nation in World War One. The bricks bear the names and sentiments of others, some once in uniform, some still in uniform, some who served their loved ones in other ways and all of them recognized for and by those they touched.

If you purchased a brick in someone's memory, call and let us tell the story your gift hints at. The bricks series is written by Steve Donovan. He can be reached at 781-837-7782.

They first saw each other in the hallway of Quincy High School. He never forgot the girl in the red dress her grandmother made for her, and she was determined to meet the tall young man with the brown, wavy hair. Frank would always tell friends he chased her until she caught him. She was 17 and he 18 when she finally arranged to be introduced to Frank at a party where serendipity played no role.

Frank had worked from the age of six. He first pulled a wagon filled with vegetables, selling them for a man with a large garden. He also helped the man make beer and was rewarded with some money and fresh produce for his family. Food was an important contribution since his father had died when Frank was just four. He diligently walked the railroad tracks picking up the coal bounced from trains' coal hoppers and gave it to his mother to help heat the family home.

Frank Welch and Rita Marie St. John were married in September 1940, and Frank was soon working nights at the Bethlehem Steel Shipyard in Quincy while Rita worked days as a salesperson. The young couple had a daughter, Patricia, and a son, Thomas, in their first two years of marriage. Another son, Richard, arrived in the third year while Frank was working at the Lawley Shipyard in Neponset.

World War II interrupted their family life. Frank was offered a commission in the Seabees, but Rita talked him

out of it, fearing he would be shipped right out. He relented and enlisted, just nine months after the arrival of baby Richard, in the regular Navy. He left for boot camp in Geneva, N.Y., where, after training, he was promoted to Master at Arms. Rita soon joined him, but Frank was then transferred to San Diego and Rita returned to their home. He enjoyed the San Diego area but was continually frustrated by a service life that never allowed him to contribute his mind and energy effectively. He was a person who reveled in getting things accomplished and in the Navy he was relegated to rote work or, worse, standing in lines. He vowed after his discharge that he would not stand in a line again in his life.

Frank returned home to Rita and his three children after his discharge. The United States had put all its resources into the war effort and manufacturing of home goods had suffered. There was a great demand for furniture and so the couple decided to sell refurbished furniture from a store they rented on Bridge Street in North Weymouth. The business did well initially but, after the manufacturing plants got back into produc-

tion homes — DUXBURY — A Drama



In 1946, they decided to rent out their home, move to New Jersey, and rent there. Frank was accepted into the carpenter's union and went to work building homes. At one point, work dried up and he found a job at a shipyard in New York City but within months was back building homes in New Jersey again. In 1947, Frank began building a home for his family but in the end decided instead to move back to Massachusetts where Rita would give birth to their fourth child, Claire Deborah. Frank returned to work at the Quincy shipyard.

The family soon moved to a huge home in Braintree on Middle Street and, with more rooms than people, decided to take in elderly folks who needed care in their later years. They called their nursing home The John Scott House, and Frank would put in nearly as many hours renovating the house as he did at the shipyard. Rita and he would discuss and agree upon the direction their new business would take. The John Scott House proved such a success that Frank had to renovate and then move his family into the old barn beside it. By 1952, when their fifth child, Michael Francis, was born, the John Scott House was generating sufficient income so that Frank was able to leave his job at the shipyard.

Nursing homes became in-

creasingly regulated as years went by. As easy as it had been to get into the business, Frank and Rita were finding it was difficult to stay in it and prosper. But they persevered, built more homes, followed the increasingly incomprehensive Massachusetts rules and always tried to offer patients and their families new ways to feel included in the process of caring for the aged.

In the late '50s they renovated an old Victorian mansion on Quincy Avenue, East Braintree, and named it the Cedarcliff Rest Home. It was designed to meet the needs of elders who did not need the levels of assistance provided at the John Scott House.

Their family grew along with their business. Marianne arrived in 1955 and James Joseph, their seventh and last child, in 1961.

Frank designed the Colonial Nursing Home to exceed industry standards. The Colonial opened in 1963 and was an industry flagship. The reputation they built over the years has stood the test of time and continues to offer innovative attention to the elderly they care for.

into Canada. Over the years he upgraded his toys, purchasing a Bluebird, which was described as a condominium on wheels. They drove RVs for 40 years before parking theirs and buying a vacation place in Florida. They finally sold the Bluebird and downsized to a smaller RV but, at a trailer show, Frank impulsively traded that in on another Bluebird. He was happy as a lark with his new toy, which he named "Rita Marie."

In 1976 Frank and Rita sold their Braintree home and moved to Duxbury on Heritage Lane. Later they found the perfect home on Marshall Street and moved to Standish Shore where they could look out over the bay toward Clark's Island. It would be their home for 32 wonderful years.

On their final trip together in "Rita Marie," Frank was driving through the mountains of Tennessee when he had difficulty breathing. He was admitted to a local hospital with his third bout of pneumonia but recovered enough to later visit Europe. In Italy they called on old friends John and Jenny Volpe. The former Massachusetts Governor was the U.S. Ambassador to Italy and was able to take them to places not open to the general public.

The management of Welch Healthcare passed to a young-

er Welch generation and Frank and Rita, although they continued to be interested and share their opinions, were pleased to watch the children doing well and utilizing important lessons learned at their father's knee. After spending a few years in Florida, they flew home. It would be Frank's last flight.

Returning to Duxbury, they lived in their home on Marshall Street but decided they needed something smaller and, as the Welch Healthcare and Retirement Group was then building the Village at Duxbury, they arranged to purchase one of the new Garden Homes. After it was built to Frank's specifications, the couple moved in.

Frank's health continued to deteriorate. On Oct. 15, 2005, he had a request for his children. Rita dialed their numbers and Frank asked each, "Can you come over now?" They came and bent over him as he lay in bed. He kissed them all goodbye and whispered



in their ears.

To his granddaughter he said, "Take your time and find the right mate, just as I did."

To his sons and daughters he made a request: "Be happy and love one another always. Take care of your mother."

He died at peace with himself, nursed by family members, with his wife, their sons, daughters, grandchildren and extended family around him. After he had finally kissed them all he said, "What do I do now? Just lie here?"

Frank passed away on Oct. 17, 2005.